



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Robert F. McDonnell
Governor

To the Soldiers, Airmen and Families of the Virginia National Guard:

With the return of approximately 30 Soldiers from the Fort Belvoir-based 29th Infantry Division from Afghanistan in early July, the Virginia National Guard reached a historic point in its history: there are no Virginia Army or Air Guard units serving on federal active duty. However, there are still a number of individual Soldiers and Airmen serving around the world.

While this is only a temporary downturn of units scheduled for possible mobilization in the near future, this is a good time for all Virginians to recognize the important mission of the National Guard in our fight for freedom. Today's Virginia National Guard is the best trained, best equipped, and most experienced force our Commonwealth has known in some time. I want to personally express my appreciation and that of a grateful Commonwealth for the outstanding service of our men and women of the National Guard.

In the last 10 months, we have seen the return of Guard units from Iraq and Afghanistan where they distinguished themselves for outstanding service. Whether it was the Soldiers of Task Force 183 providing security for critical supply convoys in Iraq; the aviators of the 2nd Battalion, 224th Aviation Regiment flying combat air assault missions in Iraq; the 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team leading active Army and NATO troops in counter insurgency operations in Afghanistan; the Soldiers of the Provincial Reconstruction Team Security Force Platoon supporting operations to rebuild infrastructure, assist with agriculture, build wells and provide healthcare to the people across the many provinces of Afghanistan; or the Airmen of the 203rd RED HORSE Squadron conducting civil engineering projects throughout the region, the Virginia Guard performed with distinction and set a high mark for what this country can expect from its National Guard.

Citizen Soldiers and Airmen have a difficult challenge in balancing their full-time civilian careers with maintaining a high state of readiness in order to rapidly respond to the call of the Commonwealth and to the Nation during times of need. Since I became Governor, I have had the honor of meeting and thanking many of you. It is important that all Guardsmen, their families, and their employers know how much I and my Administration appreciate your sacrifice on behalf of the Commonwealth and Nation.

The Commonwealth owes a special debt of gratitude to our Guard families for their support of the mission. They are too often the unsung heroes, and my family knows first-hand the challenges faced as they wait for their deployed loved ones to return home. I thank each of you for your support and patriotism.

We must also remember the brave heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice while on missions overseas. They laid down their lives so that others might have the chance to live a better life based on democratic ideals, free from tyranny. We must never forget these outstanding Virginians. The Virginia National Guard will continue to support the needs and challenges of the Nation and the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Emporia-based 1710th Transportation Company recently received a mobilization order to begin federal active duty in April 2012 to support Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The 1710th's commitment to duty, like those before them, will be fully supported by those of us at home.

In closing, I offer my sincerest thanks and appreciation for the tremendous work and incredible sacrifice of our Virginia Guard Soldiers, Airmen, families, and citizen workforce for everything you have done to help defend the ideals of freedom that we all hold so dear.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert F. McDonnell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "McDonnell" clearly legible.

Robert F. McDonnell